

HIS SECRET.

PART I.

TIME out of mind, since the very beginning of things, as it seemed to the parishioners of Boscobel, the Abbey had belonged to a Trevannion. It was not possible to conceive any other association with those old grey walls, those wide gardens and lawns, and flower-beds, melting almost imperceptibly into fair water-meadows, a fertile table-land sheltered by a range of green hills. Boscobel is a little town in a valley, where sweet pastoral Devon borders her wilder sister Cornwall—a quiet little town, nestling in a hollow between moorland and hill, rich in well-watered pastures, and in an ideal trout-stream, and set in the heart of a fine hunting country.

It was a shock to Boscobel when the last of the Trevannions died, leaving only a daughter behind him to inherit the Abbey estate. That the young lady was one of the handsomest women in the neighbourhood offered no consolation, since it was all the more likely that she would marry, and bring a stranger to rule over the estate, and dictate to the tenants, and make things generally unpleasant. The Squire's will stipulated that any such husband was to assume the name and arms of Trevannion: but this, in the opinion of the parish, would be an idle falsification, a poor and shallow pretence. The only Trevannions Boscobel could honour and revere were Trevannions raised on the soil. There was a general leaning to the idea that Miss Trevannion would throw herself away, albeit she was considered a young lady of good parts as well as of fine person. And this foreboding was supposed to be fully realized when it was known that she had engaged herself to Captain Wyatt, who had not an acre

of land in the county, and who must therefore necessarily be unworthy of credit.

He was an officer, who had come down to Boscobel to hunt; and his only friend in the neighbourhood was Squire Faversham, of the Copse, a young man who enjoyed the reputation of leading a wild life in London, when he was neither hunting nor shooting in Devonshire. The fact of his friendship with Faversham was taken as all-sufficient evidence that Captain Wyatt was wild, and that whatever means he had possessed at the beginning of his career had been gambled or horse-raced away before now.

Whether this dismal view of the case were true or false, Isabel Trevannion married this stranger to the soil, only six weeks after she met him for the first time at a ball in the old Town Hall; not the splendid Gothic edifice of the existing Boscobel, but the Town Hall of a hundred years ago, when George the Third was king, and when a Devonshire heiress with an estate worth three thousand a year was a much more central and important feature in the world where she lived than she would be nowadays.

Boscobel was so far correct in its theorizing: the Captain was decidedly out-at-elbows. He was a younger son in a good old Shropshire family, in which means were not abundant; and whatever small patrimony had been his at the outset, had dwindled and vanished in the course of a somewhat distinguished military career. He had fought in the East Indies under Clive and Mann, and his handsome features still bore the bronze of an Indian sun. But although Geoffrey Wyatt was about as poorly off as a man could be, his marriage with Isabel Trevannion was not the less a love match. He had fallen in love with her on that first night at the Town Hall, having ample opportunity to admire the fair frank face, to sun himself in the radiance of blue eyes, during the leisurely progress of country dance and cotillon. He had time while they promenaded the rooms to discover that the girl's mind was as bright as her eyes, and that she was disposed to think well of him. His friend, Squire Faversham, congratulated him on his conquest, as they drove home to Copse Hill in a rumbling old chariot.

'It would have been the making of me, if she'd ever been as civil to *me*!' said Faversham, with a pang of envy. 'I paid her a good deal of attention last winter, but it was no use. I'm not good-looking enough, I suppose; and then you see these young women like the idea of a soldier—an Indian hero, who may be a lord some day, like Bob Clive.'

The two young men went a few days afterwards to call on the

heiress. The Favershams and Trevannions had always been friendly, and the Squire had the right of approach.

Isabel received them with smiles and blushes and happy looks, which were not meant for Faversham. That hare-brained young gentleman knew only too well that it was not for him the blue eyes sparkled and danced so beautifully, while dimples came and went in the fair cheeks. But he was a good-natured youth, and did not want to spoil sport. He asked Isabel to let his friend see the Abbey, which was full of beauty and interest from an archaeological point of view, and she rose gaily to accompany them through the rooms.

‘Servants are so stupid,’ she said, ‘they can never explain things properly. I had better take Mr. Faversham’s friend round myself, had I not, Auntie?’

This question was addressed to the dearest old lady in the world, who pretended to take care of Isabel, but whose guardianship was very mildly exercised; insomuch as she spent her existence knitting, or reading the British Essayists, in one particular arm-chair, which stood by the fire in winter and in a sunny window in summer, and never troubled herself about anything, so long as her niece was well and happy. The question was therefore merely a matter of form. The old lady smiled and nodded; the young one went off with the two gentlemen. The house took a long time to see. It was so rich in relics and memories; the remains of old monastic days, the portraits of dead and gone ancestors; curious little cabinet pictures collected in the Low Countries, mosaics and marbles bought by dilettante Trevannions in their Italian travels. Miss Trevannion and her guests lingered in the corridors, where there were most inviting velvet-cushioned window-seats. They loitered over the old china, Isabel explaining and exhibiting the family treasures with a pardonable pride. She had seen so little of this world, outside Boscobel Abbey, that she might be forgiven if she fancied the old house just the one most interesting thing in the universe. Her father had been born in it, her mother had lived and died in it, and she had loved them both so well, that the mere sense of its association with them made the gray old mansion sacred. She was pleased by Captain Wyatt’s warm admiration of the place.

‘You ought to see the gardens in summer,’ she said, as they stood in one of the windows looking out at blossomless lawns.

When summer came Geoffrey Wyatt was master at Boscobel Abbey, and signed himself Wyatt Trevannion. His

wife idolized him, and he doated upon her; yet, like many doating lovers, they sometimes quarrelled. That even and placid affection which the poet calls thrice blessed was not theirs. They were both hot-tempered; the heiress had always been, in the language of admiring friends, high-spirited; and her high spirit showed itself occasionally, even to an idolized husband. She was jealous, suspicious of his attentions to other women; and it was Geoffrey's habit to be attentive to every pretty woman. She was jealous of his pleasures—hated him to be away from her; and she could not quite forget that he owed her everything, that he had been penniless Geoffrey Wyatt of nowhere in particular before her love made him Wyatt Trevannion, master of the dearest old house in the world, and the first gentleman in Boscobel. It never occurred to her rustic innocence that Boscobel was a very small dominion in which to be Prince Consort.

Aunt Tabitha, the dear little old lady in black brocade and gold-rimmed spectacles, did her best to keep peace between the married lovers, so long as she sat beside their hearth; but the first winter of their domestic life saw the evanishment of that gentle figure, and then there was no one to murmur tender little conciliatory speeches when the two quarrelled. Happily their quarrels, though not unfrequent, were brief, and generally ended with one of those tender reconciliations which are said to be the renewal of love.

Several winters and summers had come and gone since Geoffrey looked out at the Abbey gardens for the first time, and it could not be said that Isabel was otherwise than happy in her married life. There were no children, but this fact was taken to heart much more deeply by the inhabitants of Boscobel in general than by Isabel herself. She loved her husband too entirely and profoundly to have any sense of loss in the absence of other ties. So long as she had him she had everything; her chief trouble was that she had not always him. He was an ardent sportsman, and from September to April his days were devoted to hunting and shooting. He was fond of racing, and in the summer was often away at distant race meetings. He had a modest racing stud of his own, and had won cups in a small way. Isabel had never grudged him the money which he wasted on this expensive amusement; but she resented his frequent absence from home, and this was their chief ground of quarrel.

It was a delicious morning in July, and Geoffrey had returned the night before from one of those odious race-

meetings, and there was no hunting or shooting possible—not even otter-hunting. Isabel and her husband strolled in the lovely old gardens; all flowers and sunlight, and velvet lawn and glancing shadows of birds; she with her hands clasped round his arm, he looking down with tender admiration at the beautiful face, the soft chestnut hair falling in loose curls upon the white neck.

‘Upon my soul you grow handsomer every day, Belle!’ he exclaimed.

‘If you really think so it must be because you see me so seldom,’ she said, pleased at his praise, yet with an undertone of resentment. ‘I possess that charm of novelty which other men’s wives can hardly have.’

‘I protest now, Bella, I was only away a fortnight this last bout; a fortnight from here to York and back again, allowing three days for the races. If you knew at what a rate I travelled, every bone in my body shaken within an inch of dislocation in their confounded post-chaises.’

‘I wish it might cure you of ever wanting to go away again, love,’ she said, ‘and then I would be grateful to York races all the days of my life.’

‘You ought to be very grateful as it is for the cup I won for you with Meer Jaffier. I don’t think you’ve so much as looked at it since I put it in the glass case in the hall.’

‘Those cups in the hall will get the house robbed some of these days,’ answered Isabel petulantly. ‘Vulgar, ugly things! I hate the sight of them, for they remind me how much of my married life I have had to spend alone.’

‘You know you might sometimes go with me, if you pleased,’ remonstrated Geoffrey.

‘Yes, and have *my* bones shaken in your post-chaises, and mix with the horrible coarse creatures you meet at such places, and see sights and hear language which would make me despise myself for the rest of my life. Why cannot you stay at home, where we are so happy?’

‘Yes, love, thank God we are very happy. Let us make the most of our happiness while it lasts; one can never tell how long the sun may shine. Is not this summer morning lovely—and that sunny stretch of grass—and the river beyond it—and the lights and shadows dancing on the hill? I have been reminded of my own good fortune to-day by a long letter from an unhappy beggar who was my brother officer and my equal in everything, before I won your love. Don’t you think such a comparison as that should make me grateful to Providence? What am I better than Jasper Dane that I should be so blest by Fate?’

'Jasper Dane. Is that your friend's name? Tell me all about him,' Isabel answered gently, touched by her husband's talk of his happiness.

What could she wish for in life more than to make him happy! She knew that she had sometimes wounded him, had been cruel and bitter of speech, out of overweening love which ran into jealousy.

'He is one of the cleverest fellows I ever knew,' said Geoffrey; 'not showy or brilliant, but a man of unbounded common sense and solidity. We were together in India. He fought like a devil at Buxar, and yet he is one of those slender, pale-faced men who would seem more in his place in a library. He rose from the ranks—a small tradesman's son, who ran away from home on account of a step-mother's severity; and some of our fellows slighted him on that score. But thank God I had none of their petty prejudices. Dane was the cleverest officer in the regiment, and about the best behaved, and he and I were close friends. And now he has left the army, broken in health, he tells me, and he wants civilian's employment of some kind, and fancies I can help him. Yet, Heaven knows how I could do so, unless'—here he hesitated a little, as if his thoughts were straying far ahead of his speech—'unless you would like me to carry out an idea which has come into my head while I have been talking to you.'

'I should like you to do anything that is kind and friendly to an old friend,' answered Isabel. 'But what is this idea of yours?'

'I've been thinking what a capital fellow Jasper would be to manage your property for me—a kind of steward and accountant; a factotum to look after everything and keep everybody else in check. We've a bailiff for the home-farm, but the bailiff wants supervision; and we've an agent to collect the rents, and draw up leases, and so on; but we want a general custodian; one all-pervading mind; a man who could have no interest outside our interests. I have often felt the want of such a fellow—a man who would have the pluck to pull me up when I was spending too much money—who wouldn't be afraid to tell me I was a fool!'

'I don't think you'd like that, Geoffrey, even from Mr. Dane.'

'Oh yes, I should. Dane is one of those plain-sailing, hard-headed fellows, from whom one can stand a great deal. He used to talk to me very freely in days gone by.'

'Perhaps,' answered Isabel; 'but then you were not my husband.'

'To be sure, that makes a difference, doesn't it? But I think I could bear Dane's lecturing even now, knowing it was all for my own good. He was adjutant of our regiment—a wonderful hand at accounts; a thoroughly commercial mind, inherited from the tradesman father, no doubt. And you would not find him a disagreeable fellow about the house. He is very quiet and gentlemanlike, and has refined tastes.'

'In spite of the tradesman father?'

'Oh, blood will tell of course. I daresay you would see a difference between him and a man of family.'

'Like Faversham, for instance, who made me an offer in a letter which might have been written by my cowboy—and then was surprised that I refused to marry him. Will it please you to have this Mr. Dane here, Geoffrey?'

'I really think it will be a relief to my mind,' answered her husband. 'I have felt myself getting into a financial muddle lately; and I believe that we both are cheated and imposed upon to a large extent. You are so generous, and I am so careless. A cool, clear-headed fellow like Dane would be a treasure to us.'

'And you will not let him interfere with our domestic life? You will not let him deprive me of your society?'

'My dearest, what are you thinking of? I want the man for his usefulness—not for his company.'

This assurance satisfied Mrs. Trevannion, and her husband wrote to his old friend by that evening's mail, offering him rooms at the Abbey, with a modest salary. 'As the movement is one of economy you must not expect me to be lavish!' he wrote. 'I daresay with your talents you might do something better, but place-hunting is hard work. You say you are out of health. Our mild climate, pure air, and quiet life ought to go a long way towards curing you; and perhaps you may like to be domiciled with an old friend who has not forgotten old times.'

Dane wrote by return of post, gratefully accepting the offer; and a week afterwards he came to the Abbey, arriving in the late twilight of a lovely day.

Geoffrey and his wife were sitting on the terrace in front of the drawing-room windows, with their field and household favourites—a brace of Irish setters, a Blenheim spaniel, and a greyhound or two grouped about them. In a home where there are no children, dogs are apt to come conspicuously into the foreground.

The butler brought Mr. Dane to the terrace, and the two men greeted each other heartily; Geoffrey receiving his

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friend with loud-voiced genial welcome, Jasper Dane quietly cordial.

'If you knew how cheering it is to be so welcomed in such a home as this after ten years of Indian exile, you would have some idea of what I must feel for your husband, Mrs. Trevannion,' said Mr. Dane, when Geoffrey had presented him to the mistress of the Abbey.

She murmured some vague civility, and looked at him, not unkindly but critically, a little doubtful as to her wisdom in having allowed a new element to be introduced into her domestic life. 'I hope he will keep his place,' she thought.

The man looked every inch a gentleman, in spite of his obscure origin. He was tall and slim, pale, delicate-featured, with dreamy gray eyes, and the whitest hands Mrs. Trevannion had ever seen in a man. Indian suns which had baked Geoffrey's complexion to a warrior-like bronze, had only given a faint yellow tinge, like the hue of old ivory, to Jasper's pale countenance. He had never affected out-of-door pursuits, preferring books and seclusion.

'He looks as if he would keep his place,' mused Mrs. Trevannion, whose chief thought about the stranger was an ardent hope that she and her husband might see as little as possible of him.

'If he absorbs Geoffrey I shall hate him,' she said to herself.

The first effect of Mr. Dane's arrival was to give Mrs. Trevannion more of her husband's society than she had enjoyed before his coming. His scrutiny of the financial position revealed a state of things which demanded an immediate narrowing of Captain Wyatt-Trevannion's expenses. He had been spending his wife's money with the recklessness of a man who, having had hitherto to deal with hundreds, believed thousands inexhaustible. With grave straightforwardness, Jasper Dane showed his friend that he had been imposing on his wife's generosity, taking an unworthy advantage of her unquestioning love. If he were to continue his present course, he would end by encumbering the Trevannion estate by making his wife a beggar. The first thing to be done was to give up the racing stud.

'It's such a small one,' said Geoffrey, pathetically.

'It is big enough to spoil two thousand a year,' answered Dane. 'And then there are your bets.'

'A gentleman ought to back his own horses. It shows good faith,' said Geoffrey. 'But the stud shall be sold, and I'll bet no more. You are right, Dane. Bell has been too generous to me. I am bound to consider her welfare

above everything. But a country gentleman's life without a racing stable is deucedly humdrum.'

'Humdrum, with such a wife as yours,' exclaimed Dane, with a faint glow on his sallow cheeks. 'You ought to be happy with her in a desert island.'

'I'm going to sell the racers, so you needn't sermonize,' retorted Geoffrey; and the horses were sold at Exeter shortly afterwards, Mr. Dane having held his friend to his resolution, meanwhile, with a firmness of hand remarkable in a dependent. Indeed, there were many things in which Mr. Dane soon showed himself master; Geoffrey's self-indulgent nature lending itself easily to leading-strings.

There was ample room for an independent existence in the spacious old Abbey. Mr. Dane had his own suite of rooms at the end of a southward-fronting wing, rooms which opened on the picture-gallery, where the effigies of departed Trevanions scowled or simpered under a top-light. He had sent to London for two large chests of books, the companions of his Indian exile, and with these, which were special in character, and the somewhat common-place library of the Abbey he had plenty of material for thought and study. He seemed fond of solitude—only came to the drawing-room when he was particularly invited, and gave Mrs. Trevannion no ground for complaining that he did not keep his place.

She was very grateful to him for the sale of the race-horses, and was too impulsive to refrain from letting him know her gratitude.

'Do you know I had an impression that we were being ruined,' she said; 'but I could not tell Geoffrey so. It would have seemed ungenerous.'

'You are a wonderful woman,' said Mr. Dane, looking at her gravely. 'A wonderful wife, and Geoffrey ought to be the happiest fellow in creation.'

'Well, I hope he is moderately happy. I only live to please him. Why do we not see more of you, Mr. Dane?' she went on in a little gush of kindness, forgetting how anxious she had been to keep him out of the sanctuary of domestic life.

Happily Jasper Dane was too modest or too fond of solitude to take undue advantage of her kindness—but on those rare evenings which he spent with them, his society proved so agreeable to both husband and wife, that before he had been a year at the Abbey, his presence became a natural element in their lives, and he was seldom out of their company. They had both a high opinion of his capacity, and an unlimited belief in his faithfulness, and they appealed

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to his superior wisdom and experience continually. He was a link between Geoffrey and his happy-go-lucky youth—that youth which a man is apt faintly to regret amidst the calmer blessings of mature life. He was companionable to the wife in many things in which her husband could not be her companion. She had studied French and Italian literature, and he was the first person whom she had ever met able to talk to her of Corneille and Racine, Dante and Tasso. She was fond of music, and here was the very first listener who seemed thoroughly to understand and appreciate Bach. She had a taste for art, which went beyond painting on velvet, and the beautification of fire-screens, and Mr. Dane was able to assist her with his superior technical skill and knowledge. He taught her chess, and they played many a long thoughtful game together beside the winter fire, while Geoffrey sprawled in his armchair, and slept the sleep of the tired sportsman, his only consciousness of existence a dim sense of ineffable content, mixed with the sputter and sparkle of the wide wood fire.

By the time Jasper Dane had been three years at the Abbey, Mr. and Mrs. Trevannion had come to regard him as a necessary part of their existence. It would be impossible for either to get on without him. They both owed him so much, that each would have been ashamed to confess the extent of the debt, and could only cancel it by silent gratitude. For it was not only that he had set their house in order, and introduced golden rules of thrift and method into a disorderly household, but he had brought the element of domestic peace into their lives. The horse-racing being put aside, Geoffrey's absences from home rarely went beyond a long day's hunting or shooting; and when he was away, Mr. Dane's company went far to enliven the monotony of the tranquil hours. It was not that he intruded upon the wife's solitude; but he was in his rooms—or in the gardens—somewhere on the premises, to be appealed to if he were wanted. He was always ready to be consulted about small details—a dinner, or a hunting breakfast, an archery meeting, or any entertainment which the lady of the Abbey considered it her duty to provide for her neighbours. He took a genuine interest in these things, which always bored Geoffrey. Altogether life was harmonized into smoothness by his presence; and yet he was one of the most unobtrusive of men.

Geoffrey behaved wondrously well about the racing stable. He sighed in secret over its surrender; but he never told his wife how much the sacrifice cost him, or how sorely he

missed the excitement of the turf, the intercourse with the outer world, with men of keener wit than his familiar friends of the hunt. Dane was always reminding him, in a friendly way, that he owed everything to his wife and had no right to squander her money—so when the old master of the staghounds died, and the neighbourhood wanted Captain Wyatt Trevannion to take the hounds, Geoffrey resolutely refused that honour, congenial as the office would have been to him. He told himself that Dane had spoken the truth. He had no right to waste his wife's money.

'I'm afraid if I go on in this way I shall dwindle into a stay-at-home husband, tied to my wife's apron-strings,' he thought; 'but it is something to know that Belle is happier than she used to be.'

Belle was, indeed, completely happy in these days. She hung about her husband as tenderly as she had done in the first year of her married life; and there were now few flashes of jealousy, or little gusts of bitter speech. Geoffrey was getting older. He did not admire pretty women so much as of old—was content to sun himself in that one beautiful face which he had a legal right to worship. Perhaps the placid monotony of prosperous idleness was slowly sapping his energies. He had lost much of his old fire and impetuosity; but he was better tempered than when his wits were kept on the rack by the hazards of horse-racing, and he was more devoted to his wife than ever. The worthy inhabitants of Boscobel began to forgive him for his audacity in marrying Miss Trevannion, and readily acknowledged that he made a very good husband, and was a pleasant, hospitable kind of man to have at the Abbey, a very fair substitute for the extinct male line of the Trevannions.

There was only one cloud upon Isabel Trevannion's happiness at this period of her life, and that arose from a suspicion which she tried to dismiss from her thoughts as a foolish fancy, perhaps even an unworthy inspiration of feminine vanity.

'I hope I am not that kind of woman,' she had said to herself more than once; 'a woman who believes that no man can escape falling in love with her.'

Yet, reason with herself as she might, the vague uncomfortable suspicion would flit across her mind now and again, that her husband's devoted friend and faithful steward cared for her more than was well for his peace. He had never by word or look offended her modesty. She was not a woman to live an hour under the same roof with a man who could so offend. He had been her faithful servant,

her frequent companion for three placid, monotonous years : and he had never failed in the most profound respect that man can pay to woman. Custom had not lessened his reverence for her. Had she been a queen she could not have received a more unvarying homage. Yet, by some subtle power of expression, by something so undefinable and mysterious that it seemed a kind of magnetism, he had revealed a feeling which she needs must pity, even while she tried to shut her mind against the fact of its existence.

She did pity him. There were traces of pain sometimes in that pale spiritual face which touched her heart with divine compassion. There was a mute fidelity of affection which she could neither mistake nor resent. Was she not indebted to Jasper Dane for the happiness which had made her domestic life perfect ? His thoughtful wisdom, his outspoken fidelity, had given her back her husband.

As that vague suspicion of hers grew into something very near akin to certainty, Isabel contrived to spend less of her life in Mr. Dane's society. Music, art, literature, had made a meeting point for their sympathies. The lady seemed all at once to have grown weary of her books, her easel, her harpsichord. She had a sudden passion for the out-of-door life of which her husband was so fond. She rode with him, accompanied him on his trout fishing expeditions in the woody combs, following each lovely wind and reach of the romantic river.

'I hope I don't plague you with my company, Geoffrey,' she said. 'It makes me very happy to be with you.'

'Plague me, love ! Do you suppose I am not glad of such a companion ? You used to be such a stay-at-home, with your nose always in a book, like Dane, or studying tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee on that harpsichord of yours.'

'Do you think the change is for the better, dearest ?' she asked with that vein of coquetry which is in the grain of a woman's love.

'I should be a curmudgeon if I did not,' he answered, laying down his rod, in order to throw his arm round the matron's slim waist, and to administer a sounding kiss on the blushing cheek. 'I shall mount you on the best hunter that was ever backed, and you shall follow the stag-hounds with me next winter.'

'I should like it of all things, Geoffrey ; but don't you think it would set people talking ?'

There were very few hunting ladies in those days.

'Let them talk ! They shall say how handsome my wife looks when she's flushed with a quick run.'

All through the decline of summer and the slow decay of autumn, Geoffrey Trevannion and his wife were close companions; the lady spending very little of her life apart from her husband, and Jasper Dane thrown back upon a severely business-like existence. He had a great deal to do in his character of land steward, rode far and wide upon the steady old brown hack which Trevannion had allotted to him, and spent all his leisure in the seclusion of his own rooms.

'I believe Dane is writing a book,' said Geoffrey, laughing heartily at what he considered a prodigious joke; 'I see his light burning every night when we go to bed. I wonder whether it is a tragedy, or a treatise on metaphysics. He looks capable of either. I used to accuse him of writing verses when we were in India.'

One day in the beginning of November, Geoffrey and his friend went for a long ride together. The master of the Abbey was required to inspect some farm buildings which wanted important repairs; an improvement so costly that Mr. Dane refused to order it upon his own responsibility. The farm was between eleven and twelve miles from the Abbey, and the two gentlemen were away a long time upon their errand, and came back looking fagged by their ride.

'What is the matter, Geoffrey?' Mrs. Trevannion asked anxiously, as her husband stretched himself in his arm-chair before the drawing-room fire, while he waited for the dinner bell; 'I never saw you look so pale.'

'It was a chilly, wearisome ride, and Dane plagued my soul out with his talk about business. I am sorry to tell you that he is going to leave us.'

She gave a little start, and the colour faded from her cheek, as if with the apprehension of evil. The fear which startled her was vague and far off, but it was fear.

'I am sorry for your sake,' she said quietly. 'I'm afraid you will miss him.'

'Yes, I shall have to take to business habits, to manage the property myself. I never could trust a stranger as I have trusted Dane. I knew he was incorruptible—rectitude itself in money matters. He is a man of few wants and no extravagances. Yes, he is a loss—but he must go. It is best so.'

'He is not happy with us?'

'Evidently not, since he wishes to go.'

'It was his wish to leave us?'

'Yes, his and mine too. He gave me reasons which I could not gainsay. I have no right to consider my own interest before everything; useful as he has been to me I must school myself to do without him. I am afraid your estate will have

a bad manager, Belle, but I shall do my best. I think, perhaps, if you were to help me a little—you have a clearer head than I have, and you know something of Dane's system—'

'Yes, he has told me a good deal,' answered Isabel eagerly. 'Why should we not manage our estate? When is Mr. Dane to go?'

'Early next week. He is going to put everything in order—to explain all his papers—and to give me all the help he can for carrying on everything upon his own plan. He has been very useful to us. We were getting poor before he came. We have been getting rich since he took our affairs in hand.'

'And I have been ever so much happier, Geoffrey,' answered Isabel, with her hand on her husband's shoulder.

She was secretly rejoiced at Dane's decision, now that the first faint thrill of fear was over. It was as if a tremendous weight had been lifted off her mind. Of late she had dreaded every meeting with the pale, earnest-eyed steward. The chief study of her life had been to avoid him without seeming to do so.

Mr. Dane did not appear that evening; he dined in his own room, and worked late after dinner. Four o'clock was the aristocratic dinner-hour in those days, and winter evenings were long. Isabel opened her harpsichord for the first time for some months, and began a light, airy Gigue of Handel's. Jasper Dane heard the gay bright music from his room above, and his face flushed angrily at the sound. It seemed to him like a little gush of joy at his announced departure. As if her heart were rejoicing in a sense of recovered freedom.

'No doubt I have been an incubus. She has seen and understood,' he said to himself.

On the next day and the next Mr. Dane was hard at work, arranging papers and going over accounts, setting his house in order before leaving it. Geoffrey spent some hours of each day in his friend's room, receiving his instructions, learning how he had managed household expenses, repairs, out-of-door servants, stable, and garden. Nothing had been too insignificant for his stewardship. Rectitude and plain-dealing were shown in every detail of his management.

The third day was Sunday, Jasper Dane's last day at Boscobel Abbey. He was to leave by the London coach, at seven o'clock next morning.

Boscobel, never remarkable for stir or haste in its streets, a place indeed which always seemed half asleep, save when mildly revived by market-day, wore its Sabbath solemnity

with a difference. There were more people in the streets; people in Sunday clothes, going to or coming from the old Gothic church; boys in sleek broad-cloth, without the least idea of what to do with their Sabbath leisure, and yawningly longing for dinner or supper time. Bells clashed out at intervals upon the dim autumn stillness, with unnecessary vehemence; perhaps in remonstrance with the dissenters, who preferred *chapin* even without bells.

Unless a man had a full mind, or a love of nature deep enough to find enchantment in the calm beauty of woodland, hill, and river, Sunday at Boscobel was passing dreary. Geoffrey Trevannion was apt to feel the Sabbath hours hang heavily, even in the company of a beloved wife. He went to church once at least, as in duty bound, and he, Isabel, and Mr. Dane made a triangle of worshippers in the large square pew, where the green baize cushions had been slowly fading for the last half century, to a dull gray.

The three knelt together this day for the last time, and it seemed as if the thought that it was so made them paler and graver than usual. They dined together after church, and spent the evening together in the spacious panelled drawing-room, with its lofty open fire-place and glorious pile of logs, burning out the dampness and chillness of those creeping November mists which wrapped all the outside world in a dim veil.

Mrs. Trevannion had been brought up in habits of simple piety, and to her Sunday evening was not as other evenings. She liked to read some religious book aloud to her husband—a sermon of Jeremy Taylor's, a chapter of Law's "Serious Call" to which Geoffrey listened with sleepy submissiveness. Then, by way of reward, she would play Handel's sacred airs, with tender, delicate touch, on her harpsichord.

This was the first Sunday evening which Dane had spent in the drawing-room for a long time. He listened to the sermon with his earnest eyes fixed on the reader in gravest contemplation, as if he were hearing something more than the sermon—as if he were listening to the Book of Fate. He hung over the harpsichord like a man entranced.

'When shall I ever hear such melody again?' he said, with a half-cynical air; 'not unless I get to Heaven, I suppose.'

'You are going to London,' said Isabel, 'where you will have the Oratorios and the King's Theatre.'

'It will not be such music as this. Besides, I am not going to stay in London. I shall volunteer to join the army in America.'

Neither Mr. Trevannion nor his wife questioned the wisdom of such an act. Geoffrey sat staring idly at the fire. Isabel touched the keys of her harpsichord silently, deep in thought.

Presently the Abbey clock chimed the half-hour after nine, and the servants came filing in to family prayer. It was Isabel's duty to read the prayers as well as the sermon. She read them to-night in a firm, clear voice, and there was a fervour in her tone as of one relieved from trouble. The short Psalm which she read after prayers was one of thanksgiving.

'She has a heart of stone!' Jasper Dane said to himself. 'If it were flesh and blood it would bleed for me.'

When these devotions were finished, he came over to her, and held out his hand.

'Good-night and good-bye, Mrs. Trevannion; I shall have left before you come down to breakfast.'

'Good-night and good-bye,' she answered, looking straight before her, and letting her cold white fingers lie in his hand for an instant.

'Marble!—a mere piece of human marble!' he said to himself, as he turned away from her.

'I suppose I shall see you, Geoffrey?'

'Yes, I shall be astir before seven.'

And then all the house went to bed, and there was darkness throughout the Abbey, save for a night-lamp burning dimly in Mrs. Trevannion's bedchamber, a large tapestried room looking towards the Abbey church and the green hills behind.

The Abbey lay wrapped in its veil of river and meadow fog, and even that small light was hidden.

PART II.

THERE was horror in Boscobel, such as had not been known within the memory of living man, when the alarm-bell of the Abbey rung shrill in the early gray of the November morning, and men were told that Squire Trevannion had been found stabbed through the heart at the foot of his own staircase. The Abbey, guarded as few houses are guarded, by barred shutters and massive bolts, had been broken into by thieves; a pane of glass had been smashed in a narrow window in the hall, a piece cut out of the heavy shutter inside, and the bar removed. It was so narrow a window that the person entering by it must have been of slim figure—a mere slip of a boy, the constable conjectured; but a boy old enough and skilful enough to unlock and unbar the great house door without alarming the household, and to admit his confederates.

The glass cupboard in the hall had been emptied of its racing cups and jewelled-hilted swords. It was with one of these dainty court rapiers that Geoffrey Trevannion had been stabbed to death. The slim triangular blade was snapped short, near the hilt, and the chased silver hilt was missing. The thieves had begun their attack upon the plate-room. That was clear enough from the traces of their chisels on the iron-lined door; but before they could get the door open—it was in a passage behind the hall—they had been interrupted in their work by Geoffrey Trevannion, who had heard footsteps below, and had come downstairs to investigate.

One of the ruffians had been watching in the hall, while the others attacked the plate-room, and this man had stabbed Geoffrey before he could give the alarm to his household.

Mrs. Trevannion had not heard her husband leave the room, but waking a little before daybreak, she had taken alarm at his absence, and had rung her bell, and roused the household; and the servant, going to open the hall shutters, found a window open, and his master lying at the foot of the stairs in a pool of blood.

Of course a great deal of this history rested on conjecture—on the constable's acumen in putting links together, and making them into a chain. There was the violated window;

there were the marks on the strong-room door: there was the empty cupboard, which had held not only the racing-cups, but half-a-dozen tankards, from Cromwell to Queen Anne, which would now be worth their weight in gold. There was the broken sword, There were traces of muddy boots on the black and white marble pavement of the hall, and there were confused marks of footsteps on the gravel outside, as if two or three men and passed in and out of the hall door. It was all plain enough in the constable's mind; he had never known a clearer story.

'We'll have the Hue-and-cry out before to-night!' he said. 'Madam will offer a reward, I suppose?' he inquired of Mr. Dane, who stood grave and self-possessed amidst the frightened servants.

He had been interrupted in his final preparations for his journey by Mrs. Trevannion's bell, and had been one of the first to come down to the hall when the horrified footman gave the alarm.

'She will do all that is right. I believe she would give half her fortune to discover the murderer. Poor lady, it is dreadful to think of her grief. She worshipped her husband.'

'Yes, we all know that,' answered the constable, who was an old inhabitant. 'He was a fine English gentleman, a thorough sportsman, and everybody in Boscobel respected him. Folks didn't take to him just at first you see. It took time. He was a stranger, and hadn't no property of his own; and we didn't none of us think him good enough for Miss Trevannion; but he turned out the right stamp. He was true metal, kep' a good table, and a good stable, and spent his money in the town. That's what I call a gentleman! It's a great loss!'

The constable sighed, and thought it was time for him to get something in the way of refreshment. Mr. Dane was too preoccupied to think of such details, but the housekeeper would no doubt attend to the necessities of the hour; even though her master's corpse had just been carried up yonder staircase to the noble old tapestried bedchamber, where Solomon and the Queen of Sheba had looked down on his placid slumbers, and were now to see him lying stark under the linen sheet. While Jasper Dane stood in the open doorway, lost in thought, Mr. Truepenny, the constable, quietly retired to the servants' hall, feeling assured that Mrs. Baker, the housekeeper, would know what was right to be done in a liberal household, even under the present distressing circumstances.

Isabel Trevannion lay on a sofa in her dressing-room, next the tapestried chamber, shut in with her mighty grief—such a sorrow, it seemed to her, as no other woman had ever been called upon to bear. Her husband foully murdered in the full flush and vigour of manhood, slumbering peacefully by her side a few hours ago, now sleeping in death's icy sleep upon the same marriage-bed. Sudden death must always be awful, but could any death be so awful as this—so pitiful—so unnecessary—not the work of Providence, but the wickedness of men; ignorant, brutal men, greedy only for gain; having no grudge against their victim; no injury to avenge; only the professional criminal's reckless indifference to human life or human misery.

'I would have given them all my fortune; would have gone out of this house penniless, if they would but have spared him.'

Her grief had to be borne, and borne alone, and in darkness. She would see no one—not even the faithful Abigail who had once been her nurse, and who idolized her—not even Jasper Dane, who sent from time to time to ascertain her commands as the desolate days went by, under gray clouds, or shrouded in their dim autumnal mists, and the dreary ceremonials attending such a death had to be gone through—the inquest—the inquiry before the magistrates—the funeral. All had to be attended to; and Jasper Dane was on the spot, cool, collected, a thorough man of business, ready to answer every question. Of his sincere sorrow for his friend's untimely fate no one could doubt. It was obvious in his every look and word, but he made no parade of his feelings. He had postponed his journey to London for a short time only, and had transferred himself and his belongings to the Duke's Head, the chief inn at Boscobel, a quiet, reputable hostelry.

'I shall stay here as long as I can be of use to Mrs. Trevannion,' he told the Vicar; 'but I mean to fight the Provincials.'

There was a strong feeling—a thorough-going Tory feeling, the King and Lord North for ever—about the American war at Boscobel, and the Vicar was quite ready to sympathize with Mr. Dane in his desire to take up arms again for King George. Everybody in the town knew that he had fought the blacks, under Clive, and had won some distinction in an outlandish, far-away world. He had contrived to make himself respected in the place. There had been no meanness in his administration of his friend's affairs, careful as it had been. He had so carried himself in his somewhat delicate

position as to win every man's good word. And now it seemed only natural that the thirst for military glory should revive in him, and that he should want to cross the Atlantic.

He attended Geoffrey Trevannion's funeral, he waited till all inquiries as to his friend's death had terminated. The "Hue-and-Cry" had availed nothing—the police of that day had been able to find no trace of the murderer, or of the missing property. It seemed as if the burglary at Boscobel Abbey were doomed to swell the record of undiscovered crimes. Racing-cups and tankards had been melted down, no doubt. The thieves had gone their ways on the evil road to crime, indifferent as to the honest man's blood that they had shed and the loving woman's heart that they had broken.

Before he left the little west-country town, Jasper Dane begged for an interview with Mrs. Trevannion; but she refused to see him, albeit Sarah Dodd, her faithful waiting-woman, pleaded for him earnestly.

'He looks so pale and unhappy, madam,' she said, 'and I think it would be a comfort to you to talk about poor master to one that loved him as Mr. Dane did.'

'Nothing can give me any comfort—no one. Not even God, who sees and knows my misery!' answered Isabel, and in her white rigid face Sarah saw no sign of relenting.

'It seems hard for him to go away without bidding you good-bye,'—she said, persistently, not so much because she cared for Mr. Dane's feelings, as that she thought it would be good to rouse her mistress out of this dull stupor of grief—'after being like one of the family for nearly four years, and he going to America, too, to be shot, I daresay, like so many of our brave soldiers.'

But Isabel Trevannion never lifted her eyes from that spot upon the carpet where their dull gaze rested. For her it seemed as if the world had held only one man, and he was dead. What to her was the war in America—spies hanged on either side—garrisons massacred—victories—defeats. It was of no more account to her than a war in the planet Mars. Her husband, her first and only love, was murdered. She sat staring at the carpet, and thinking of the county ball where she first met Geoffrey Wyatt, where they had been partners in three country dances, and were deep in love with each other before the night was done.

Sarah Dodd went downstairs to Mr. Dane with a point-blank refusal. 'It ain't no use, she won't see no one,' she said; throwing in superfluous negatives for the sake of emphasis.

'Did she send me no message—no kindly word?' asked Jasper, lingering on the threshold of the now cheerless house.

'Lord, no, sir; she sits all day like a statter—she hasn't a word for any of us.'

Mr. Dane gave Sarah a guinea, and turned his back upon the Abbey. His trunks and portmanteaux were at the 'Duke's Head' ready for the coach. He was gone before breakfast-time next morning; and before the week was ended Boscobel was beginning to forget him.

It was a surprise for the town when his name appeared during the following year in the newspapers, and when, as the next year, and the next went by, the grave, quiet gentleman who had done a steward's work at Boscobel Abbey, was praised for the display of distinguished valour during the changing fortunes of that terrible war which now challenged the attention of Europe.

It was two years and a half since the burglary at Boscobel Abbey, and the struggle on the other side of the Atlantic was still raging fiercely, when Isabel Trevannion sat on the terrace in front of the drawing-room windows, with her dogs grouped round her in the clear evening light, very much as she had been seated years ago, when Jasper Dane came to the Abbey—except that the husband, who sat beside her then, could never be her companion again on this side of Eternity. *His* dog fawned at her knee, Duke, his favourite pointer, which she loved better than all her favourites—for the dead man's sake. But human companion she had none. She sat alone, her fair face shaded and chastened by a look of settled sorrow.

The Church and Abbey clocks were striking the half-hour after eight, the light was mellowing behind the broad boughs of the cedars on the lawn, twilight shadows were creeping up amidst the foliage of the shrubbery, and the colours of the flowers took a deeper glow as the sunset-hues brightened in the low western sky. Mrs. Trevannion closed the volume on her lap, and sat in a reverie, looking dreamily towards the sinking sun. She had never left the Abbey since her husband's death. Many women would have fled from the house, as from an accursed place, would have put the ocean between them and the scene of such terrible memories; but Isabel hugged her grief and brooded upon it. She turned a deaf ear to the pleading of those friends who tried to tempt her to their houses. 'I like to be near him,' she answered quietly. 'If his tomb were big enough, I would like to live in it. I stay as near him as I can.' Her eyes wandered

towards the churchyard, which adjoined the Abbey gardens. She could see her husband's tomb from her favourite seat on the terrace. The Abbey and the Abbey church had originally been one institution.

Little by little Mrs. Trevannion's friends had reconciled themselves to her seclusion, and had come to regard the Abbey as the tomb of the living. They called on her occasionally, but such visits were far from festive. The pale, beautiful woman, in deepest sables, exercised a depressing influence on her guests. It was, perhaps, kinder to leave her alone.

To-night her thoughts wandered to Jasper Dane, as they had often done lately, in consequence of the mention of his name in the American news. It was on just such an evening—a sweet, peaceful summer evening—that he had first come to the Abbey. The only difference was that her cup then brimmed over with joy, as it now overflowed with sorrow. While this thought was in her mind, she looked up and saw Jasper Dane coming slowly along the gravel-walk; the white, wan ghost of his former self.

Had she loved him, or had she been superstitious, she might have taken that shrunken figure for a very ghost. As it was she had no such thought. She saw the change, and, in a world from which all she loved had perished, it seemed to her only natural that another should be so changed. He was worn to a shadow, and his empty coat-sleeve was fastened to his breast. His right arm had been amputated.

She rose and gave him her hand, forgetful of everything in the past, save that he had been her husband's friend.

'I am going a little further west—to the Cornish moors,' he said, 'and I could not pass so near Boscobel without asking to see you.'

'I am sorry to see you looking so ill,' she answered, as they sat down on each side of the table, which held a tea-tray and a pile of books.

The Blenheim spaniel, which had always been a favourite of Mr. Dane's, received him with evident recognition; but Geoffrey's pointer slunk away, and did wonderful things with his spine, in the endeavour to creep under Mrs. Trevannion's armchair, from which shelter he shot baleful glances at the visitor from topaz-coloured eyes.

'I have been a little unlucky,' Jasper answered carelessly. 'I got my arm shot off in our last skirmish, and I had fever pretty badly afterwards—symptomatic fever, I think the doctors called it. They stowed me on board ship as soon as

they could. There are no more cats wanted yonder than can catch mice, and my mice-catching days seemed to be over.'

'That was very ungrateful of them, after you had fought so bravely,' answered Isabel gently. 'Did you like being over there?'

'Very much. It has been a glorious time; though there have been hideous mistakes on our part. The fighting has tested the metal of our fellows, and they have given the true ring. I wish I could have held on to the end. You have been—fairly well—I hope, since I left?'

'Oh, yes, I am well enough,' she answered, with a little bitter laugh. 'I have what the doctors call a wonderful constitution. I believe if you were to cut my head off I should go on living;' and then she fixed her eyes upon him earnestly, and said, 'The murderer has not been found yet.'

'No, I know. I have watched the English papers. I fear he will never be found.'

'Oh, yes, he will!' Mrs. Trevannion answered confidently. 'God would not let such a crime as that remain for ever un-avenged.'

'The criminal will be punished in the next world, no doubt.'

'And in this,' she answered doggedly. 'I am sure of it. What had my husband done that he should die such a death—he who was so kind, so generous, who had never injured a living creature, who had not an enemy? Is such a life to be taken, and shall there be no redress in this world as well as in the next? I should cease to believe in the all-seeing eye of Heaven, if God's judgment failed to overtake such a crime. It may be slow, but it will come. God tries our faith. For a little while the wicked seem to rejoice in their iniquity: but judgment *will* come.'

'If this idea is a consolation to you——' Jasper began gently, as though he were talking to a child, whose delusions he did not care to dispel.

'It is. It is my only consolation.'

After this he tried to withdraw her mind from this agonizing theme by talking to her about the neighbourhood, her tenantry, the changes that had taken place in his absence. He stayed with her for an hour; first on the terrace, then, as it grew darker, in the candle-lit drawing-room; and when he left her to go back to the Duke's Head, where he was to stay that night, she felt just a little cheered by his visit. A friend had come back to her out of the past—her husband's friend.

Mr. Dane stayed all the next day at Boscobel. He called on the Vicar, and that gentleman, who had always liked

him, welcomed him cordially, and was delighted to hear all about his American experiences. The war was the absorbing topic of the day, and here was a man who could tell more about it than all the newspapers put together. Mr. Ponsford, the Vicar, would not hear of Jasper Dane's going to the Cornish moors. Not yet awhile, at any rate. He must stay at the Vicarage, and fish in Boscobel river—nothing better than a little quiet angling for a man out of health.

'You will get plenty of air from the hills,' said Mr. Ponsford; 'the Cornish moors would be too bleak for you.'

An invitation so heartily given could hardly be refused.

'I shall be delighted to stay,' said Jasper. 'Your society will put me in good spirits, and I am very fond of Boscobel.'

So Jasper stayed, and fished as well as he could with his single arm, and recovered his health rapidly in that sweet, pure air, the salt breath of the distant sea sweeping over moorland and valley. The river went through the Abbey grounds, and, loitering there with rod and line on the drowsy summer afternoons, Mr. Dane had frequent opportunities for conversation with Mrs. Trevannion. She never went beyond her own gardens, except to go to church, but she spent a great part of her life in those shady old grounds, with her books, her sketching-board, and her dogs. She took no pains to avoid Jasper Dane now. The past, as regarded his feelings for her, was to her mind a dead past. She liked to talk to him because he had been Geoffrey's friend; he could tell her of her husband's youth; that adventurous time in India, when they had both served under Clive. So long as he spoke of Geoffrey she was interested; but Dane saw that his own adventures, all the toil and glory of this late war, had not a spark of interest for her.

Mr. Dane stayed more than a month at the Vicarage, and the benefit he had derived from the Boscobel climate was so great that he determined upon spending the winter in the neighbourhood. He found a decent lodging in a pastoral village about three miles from the town, a mere cluster of cottages on the slope of a heather-clad hill; and here he lived for the next year, walking or riding into Boscobel daily, and resuming the management of Mrs. Trevannion's estate.

Just a year after his return the end came, which almost everybody except Geoffrey's widow had foreseen. Mrs. Trevannion consented to marry Mr. Dane, and they were united

by Jasper's good friend, the Vicar, in the same church which had seen Geoffrey's coffin under its velvet pall, borne by the best gentlemen in the neighbourhood.

She did not profess any love for him, but she was grateful for his devotion; she liked him because he had liked her husband, and she furnished one more example of the way in which any woman may be won if her lover will only persevere in his courtship.

Except by Mr. Ponsford, and by a few of the tradespeople, the marriage did not find favour in the sight of Boscobel. The town had objected in the first instance to Geoffrey Wyatt, as an alien adventurer; but once having adopted him, the town objected still more strongly to a second husband, in the person of Jasper Dane. It was affirmed that Mrs. Trevannion would live to repent her folly.

Life went on very smoothly at the Abbey, in spite of adverse opinion in the town. If Mrs. Dane—the good old name had been renounced at last—were not happy, she was at least contented. She had in her second husband a man who could sympathize with her every taste, join in all her favourite pursuits—a man who was in all things her companion and guide. He was highly accomplished, and had an ardent appreciation of all that is most beautiful in life. There could not be a more refined home, or a better matched couple.

The few friends who visited at the Abbey were compelled to acknowledge this.

'Mr. Dane is undoubtedly a gentleman,' they said; 'a man of no family, but one of Nature's gentlemen, and he is thoroughly devoted to his wife.'

'He ought to be!' growled a bachelor, who would have liked to win such a woman. 'Mrs. Trevannion—I can't school my tongue to give her the fellow's name—is one of the handsomest women in Devonshire, and the Abbey estate is one of the best in the county.'

The outer world might believe him mercenary, but those who knew him intimately could see that the desire of worldly gain had little influenced Jasper Dane in his wooing. His habits were as simple as when he had been only Geoffrey's steward. He made little use of his wife's wealth, except to dispense it largely in charity. It was he who, in her name, established and endowed the hospital just outside Boscobel. Wherever there was sickness or want, help came from the Abbey. Mrs. Trevannion had always been liberal to those who appealed to her, but not actively and inquiringly beneficent, like her second husband. She co-operated

gladly in all his good works. Schools, cottages, church, all profited by her liberality.

‘Why should we hoard our money?’ said Jasper. ‘We have no one to inherit it after us.’

This speech was spoken within two years of their marriage; but before the third year was out a child was born at the Abbey, and Isabel Trevannion, transfigured by the bliss of maternity, sat on the sunlit terrace with her infant son in her arms; but even in her delight in this new tie, her thoughts went back to her first husband.

‘It seems hard that *he* never had a son!’ she said to herself; and looking up at Jasper’s grave face, she felt chilled by an image that kindled no warmth of womanly affection in her heart. He was her friend and companion; she respected and trusted him; but she had never loved him.

Jasper’s delight in the birth of the boy was as intense as the mother’s. He worshipped the child; and, as years went on, Trevannion—for the good old name was revived again in the boy, who was christened Trevannion, and was to take the name of Trevannion after Dane, when he came of age, thus becoming Trevannion Dane Trevannion—became the ruler of the Abbey. Father and mother concurred in spoiling him; old servants bowed down to him; his will was law. He was not a bad fellow, but impetuous and self-willed, sorely needing a control which was never exercised. Neither his father nor his mother could bear to deny him anything—to oppose any whim of his, however foolish. As he grew from childhood to boyhood he had all a country-bred boy’s tastes, fishing, shooting, riding, birds’-nesting, otter-hunting; no inclination towards study, which was a disappointment to the father; no love of art, which was a source of regret for the mother. He was beautiful, exceedingly; but as the young of the animal creation are beautiful, by reason of his activity and vigour, his lissome limbs, his sleekness and brilliant colour.

He was ten years old when his father fell ill of a lingering, wasting malady, which made him forsake his study—the familiar desk at which he had carried on all his steward’s business—and confined him to his room. He had never slept in King Solomon’s room—the tapestried bedchamber, where his friend’s murdered corpse had been laid. He occupied a panelled bedroom looking into the garden and adjoining his study. King Solomon’s room had been shut up ever since the murder. The housekeeper went in from time to time, the room was aired and cleaned, but the door was kept locked.

Lying on that which he felt to be his death-bed, Jasper Dane's sole delight was in the company of his wife and boy. She was with him almost always; waiting upon him, reading to him, comforting him; but the boy came fluttering in and out, like a bird or a butterfly—a bright, restless creature, fickle and untameable.

'It is so dull here,' he complained once, when his father coaxed him to remain. 'You look so grave, and mamma too. There is no fun; nothing for me to do. I want to ride my pony over the hills.'

'True, my boy, it is very dull for you, dull for mamma too. Go and have your scamper over the hills, but come and see me afterwards. It does me good to see you.'

'Oh, yes, I'll come, and tell you all about Robin Good-fellow,' answered the boy, kissing his hand as he ran off. The Robin in question was his pony.

It was the end of November, that dismal month in which Geoffrey Trevannion had met his fate. Jasper had been an invalid since the early summer. The doctors gave little hope of his recovery. It was a kind of atrophy. The mind was bright and clear enough, except in the night sometimes, when his wits wandered a little with low fever—but the body was slowly withering.

'That fever in America,' said the doctor, shaking his head, 'the hardships he suffered during the war.'

Those were painful nights of watching for Isabel, when her husband's mind was far astray, and he rambled horribly in his talk, now fancying himself in Bengal, now at Lexington, at Bunker's Hill, at Charleston, now muttering to himself vaguely, in a disconnected way, strange fragments of speech, accusing himself of monstrous wickedness, 'steeped to the lips in guilt,—a soul drowned in the blackest depths of sin.' It was all mere fever, the natural consequence of extreme debility and light-headedness. He was clear and calm enough in the day, when he was able to sit up in his bed, supported by a pile of pillows, and to take the stimulants that sustained the feeble flame of life.

Christmas was drawing near. The boys and girls at the Vicarage were preparing some kind of mediæval mummary, some dressing up and fooling, and Trevannion was to have his share in it. He was full of delight in the sport, delicious to him in its novelty.

'I am to be St. George and the dragon—no, Arthur is to be the dragon, with a red coat all over scales—gilt paper scales, mamma—Rhoda is making them. And I am to have a helmet and feathers. Please find me some feathers. And

we want a lot of grand clothes, for Justice, and Britannia, and Queen Elizabeth, and Old Father Christmas. Rhoda says you must have all kinds of grand things put away in chests and wardrobes, and that you can lend them to us.'

Mrs. Dane was not unwilling to be useful in the matter, but she was very anxious about her husband, whose faint hold upon life seemed growing weaker daily, and she put off compliance with her boy's reiterated request. Now to be put off about anything which he has set his heart upon is just what a spoilt child cannot endure. Trevannion made up his mind to hunt the chests and closets on his own account. The things would all be his own property by and-by, the servants had told him so. He set out upon a voyage of discovery, ransacked closets, turned over the contents of coffers, dragged into the light of day a good many fine gowns and mantuas of a long-forgotten fashion. There was one closet which he explored last of all, the roomy receptacle in his father's study. It was locked, but there is no creature so determined as a child who has always had his own way. Among the numerous gifts which his parents had lavished upon him was a super-excellent box of carpenter's tools. With the help of these instruments Master Trevannion Dane contrived to shoot back the lock of the door, a clumsy old lock at best, ponderous but futile.

The investigation of that one closet occupied an afternoon. There were stacks of old books and papers in the foreground, so piled as to wall in the back of the closet. All these had to be taken down before Trevannion came to anything interesting. Behind the books, however, he found an old trunk, a capacious old trunk, that was damp to the touch and smelt of sea-water. This box, like the closet, was locked, but Trevannion and his chisel prevailed, and after tremendous efforts he raised the lid; on the top of the trunk there were old clothes, coats, and overcoats neatly folded; and under these the boy found a dozen or more tarnished silver cups and tankards, some of them gilded inside, three or four jewelled swords, and a silver hilt, broken short off.

The brief winter day was fading by the time he made this discovery. Here was treasure-trove. He felt himself a benefactor to his family, and rushed off to his mother, panting and triumphant.

She was just lighting a candle at a table by the fire-place in her husband's bedchamber, while Jasper lay dozing behind the heavy damask curtains, when her son ran in and took hold of her gown.

'Come, mamma, come!' he said: 'I have found such lovely things in papa's closet. Silver jugs, so big'—opening his arms to express grandeur of size—'and swords. I may have one for St. George, may I not? St. George must have a sword. Rhoda made me a card-board one—but I'd rather have one of these.'

'Silver cups?' she repeated curiously. 'You are dreaming.'

'Come and see—come and see,' he cried; 'aren't you glad I found them? I may have one for my very own, mayn't I?'

She took up the candle and went with him—feeling as if she were moving in some horrible dream.

He led her to the closet, and showed her the open trunk—an old sea-chest that had been to India and back—she remembered its being brought to the Abbey for Jasper Dane, after he had established himself there.

She stood with the candle in her hand looking down at her dead husband's racing-cups—the old tankards—the jewelled swords—all the contents of the glass cupboard in the hall. And there amongst them lay the rapier hilt, in chased silver—splashed with blood—a stain which time had blackened.

'Trevannion,' she said solemnly, with her hand on the boy's shoulder, 'you must never speak of these things. No one must know.'

'But why not?'

'Never mind why,' she answered, almost fiercely. 'You must obey me.'

'But mayn't I have one of those silver things?'

'Not till I am dead and gone. You may have them all then.'

'I don't want them then. I don't want you to be dead. I want one of the swords, and one of the silver mugs, now.'

'Trevannion, you *must* obey me. You *must not* say a word about these things. Do you understand?'

'Yes, mamma,' he faltered, awed by the authority of her tone, which was new to him.

'And now go to Sarah, and do not come to me any more to-night. Your father is very ill.'

She dismissed him with a hurried kiss, and went back to the sick-room, where she sat looking into the fire.

She understood it all now. The supposed burglary was a sham—an artfully contrived pretence. He had done it—he who was lying there—who had been her husband for thirteen years—to whom she had given duty and respect, whom her

acts had honoured and her lips had praised. He, the father of her boy.

He was dying. She knew that the sands were running out in the glass of life. There could be no redress.

'I never loved him,' she said to herself; 'thank God, I never loved him.'

She softly drew back the heavy curtain and looked down at the sick man meditatively—white to the lips, but with a fierce light in her dark-blue eyes. He was sleeping, but only by fits and snatches, and she wanted him to slumber soundly. She had a plan to carry out.

She looked among the bottles on a table by the bed, and selected one which contained a sedative; a dose of which was to be given him at night, if he were too restless.

'This will do it, perhaps,' she thought, and she poured out a double dose.

When next he stirred and turned upon his pillow, she put the glass to his lips, and, accustomed to be given medicine and restoratives, he swallowed the mixture submissively, she looking down at him with those terrible eyes.

An hour later, when he was sleeping profoundly, she had him carried to the tapestried room, where her first husband's corpse had been laid. He was lifted from his own bed on a mattress, and laid on that fatal couch, she telling the servants who did it that the change to the larger room was necessary to give him more air.

A fire had been lighted at her bidding, and the room had been always kept aired. There was no absolute cruelty in the change; but the servants wondered a good deal at the proceeding. It seemed hazardous, to say the least of it.

'You may depend the doctor ordered it, or my lady wouldn't have had it done,' said Sarah, who would have thrust her right arm into a furnace at her lady's bidding.

Mrs. Trevannion sat by the fire in King Solomon's chamber all night, hardly withdrawing her eyes from the sleeper on the old four-post bed, with its twisted and elaborately carved pillars and cornice, its gloomy draperies, and faded crimson plumes. Jasper slept till close upon day-break—the cold, cheerless winter dawn, the uncanny light in which Geoffrey Trevannion's murder had been discovered. It was at this very hour the sick man's mind was always clearest. He woke and saw his wife standing at the bottom of the bed, leaning against one of the carved pillars, looking down at him.

'What a terrible long night it has been,' he said. 'I have had dreadful dreams.'

'Jasper Dane,' she said, 'I have some news for you. The murderer has been found!'

'What?'

'Do you remember when you came back from America—do you remember that summer evening on the terrace—when *his* dog shrunk away from you? I told you that Geoffrey's murderer would be discovered. I was sure of it. Providence would not have it otherwise. I was right, you see.'

He lay looking at her, feebly wiping the dampness from his brow, waiting to know the worst.

'The murderer is found, and you are he,' she said; 'the falsest friend—the vilest hypocrite, the cruellest villain who ever crawled this earth.'

'No,' he answered faintly; 'I was neither false friend, nor hypocrite. My one sin was loving you. I fought against my passion—yes, I fought a good fight. I made up my mind to go—anywhere out of reach of you—to fling away my life for your sake. When I told Geoffrey that I must go he suspected me—that day we took the long ride together—I knew it more by his manner than by what he said. He was too willing that I should leave the Abbey. My face or my speech had betrayed me. No wonder, when my very soul was steeped in love for you. To the last I meant to deal honourably with my friend—yes, to the very last—till that last night, when sleepless in my misery, I crept downstairs, and walked about the hall, and opened the window to let in the cold morning air—and, pacing up and down in this distracted state, took a rapier from the wall, and had half a mind to kill myself, when I turned and saw Geoffrey at the foot of the stairs, and the devil took possession of me that instant and prompted me to stab him. One swift, unerring thrust plunged my soul for ever in the pit of hell. My next thought was how to profit by my crime—to keep my name clear and to win you. For this I planned things so that it should seem that the house had been robbed. I had just time enough to do what was needful before your bell rang and alarmed the house—just time enough to get back to my room after the ringing of your bell. I wish to Heaven I had been killed in America. And yet—I have been your husband—life has had its sweetness.'

'I wish I had found you out soon enough to have you hanged,' she said mercilessly. 'You are dying. You will cheat the gallows and me. Do you see where you are?' she asked, plucking back the nearest window-curtain, and letting in a flood of morning light. 'You are in his room. This is

the bed on which your victim lay. Die upon it, and hope for God's mercy if you can.'

These were the last words she spoke to him. She left him to her servants, who watched him and ministered to him faithfully to the end.

He died that night, and his wife followed him to the grave within a few weeks. She hardly spoke or looked up after his death. It was a touching instance of death from a broken heart.

'You see she cared for her second husband ever so much better than she did for her first,' said every one in Boscobel.

Trevannion Dane Trevannion grew up a fine specimen of dauntless, muscular humanity, won for himself considerable renown as a dashing soldier in the Peninsular war, and lived to be the father of many Trevannions.